

Virtual Culture: Does Culture Matter Anymore?

August 2026 · 35 participants · Moderated virtual leadership forum

This forum brought together a cross-generational, cross-industry group of leaders to examine whether organizational culture still matters — and whether it can survive a increasingly virtual workplace. The consensus was clear but uneasy: culture is still viewed as the single biggest lever on collaboration, trust, and retention, yet a strong majority believe fewer organizations are actually achieving it. Leadership commitment (not tools, perks, or policy) was named repeatedly as the deciding factor, and the group split on whether fully remote work can ever sustain an authentic culture.

72%

SAY GREAT
CULTURES
ARE
BECOMING
RARER, NOT
MORE
COMMON

57%

SAY A FULLY
VIRTUAL ORG
CAN BUILD
AUTHENTIC
CULTURE —
BUT ONLY
WITH MUCH
MORE
EFFORT

50%

SAY CULTURE
"MATTERS,
BUT IS HARD
TO ATTAIN"
TODAY

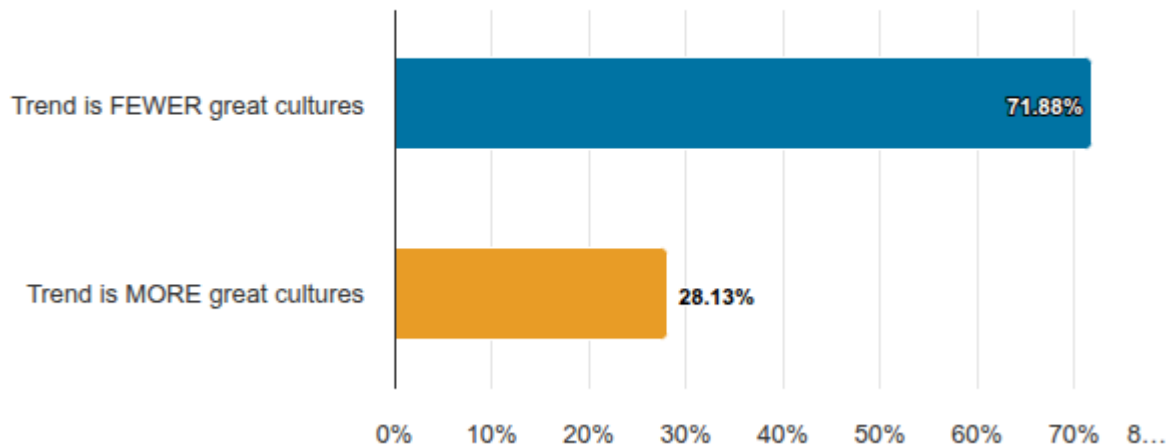
73%

POINT TO
WEAK OR
UNCOMMITTED
LEADERSHIP
AS THE TOP
BARRIER

01 Culture Is Valued More Than It's Practiced

When asked directly whether the trend is toward more or fewer organizations actually having great cultures — not just aspiring to one — nearly three-quarters of participants said the trend is negative. This was one of the most lopsided results of the session.

Trend in Organizations Actually Achieving Great Culture



INSIGHT

Participants consistently distinguished between organizations that "talk about culture" and those that live it. As one put it: "the elements that create a great culture are talked about more and more, but not seen as much... making money and/or doing things faster rather than better gets priority."

1 What's driving the erosion

Remote/hybrid work, short-tenured leadership, and profit-first pressure were the most cited causes. One participant noted the average US CEO tenure is roughly five years — "culture takes time and support to develop," making short-term leadership churn a structural obstacle.

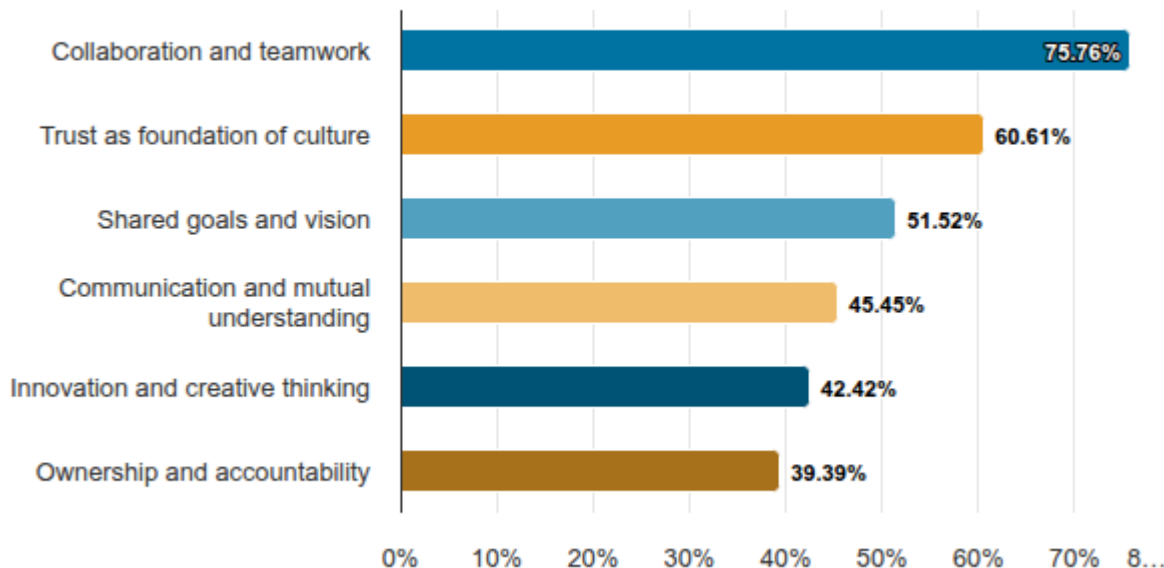
2 A generational split

Some younger participants pushed back on the pessimism: "my generation has taken this value more seriously than previous generations... much more common in my opinion for organizations to embrace a great culture instead of just trying to be efficient." The disagreement itself is a signal — perceptions of culture's trajectory diverge sharply by career stage.

02 Trust and Collaboration Are the Strategic Payoff

Asked which outcomes of a great culture carry the most strategic value, participants converged overwhelmingly on collaboration and trust — well ahead of innovation, speed, or even retention.

Elements of Culture With the Most Strategic Value (Top 6)



This ordering matters for how leaders should pitch culture internally: the business case lands hardest when framed around trust-enabled collaboration, not around softer language like "belonging" or "engagement," which ranked lower despite being frequently mentioned in open brainstorming.

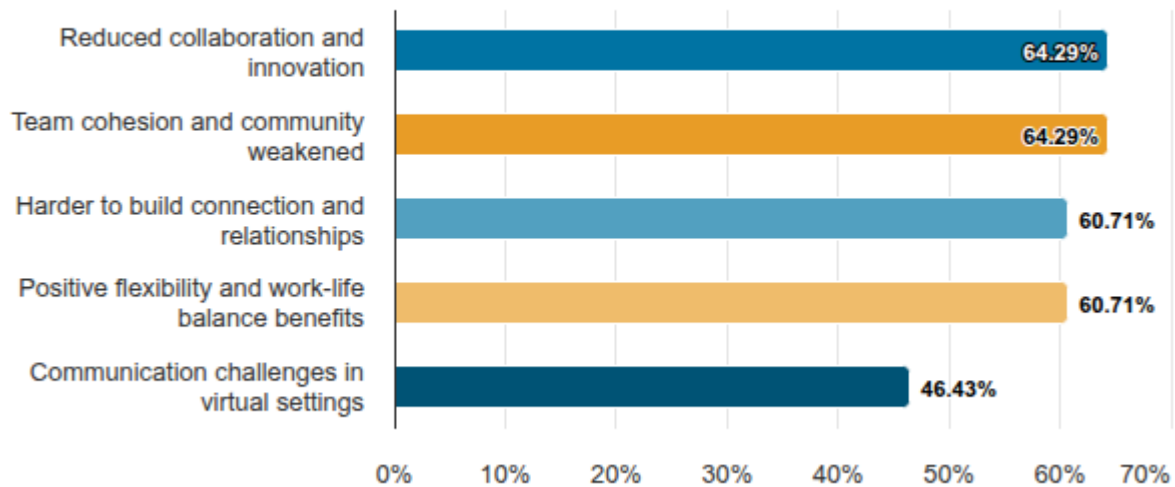
INSIGHT

Personal experience narratives reinforced this: participants describing "very positive" cultures used words like trust, teamwork, and shared purpose; those describing negative cultures described fear, silos, and leaders who "only hired yes people."

03 Virtual Work Is Reshaping Culture, Not Destroying It

The group was clear-eyed about the tradeoffs of a distributed workforce: reduced collaboration and weakened team cohesion topped the list of impacts, tied at 64% each, just ahead of harder relationship-building — but flexibility and work-life balance benefits scored nearly as high, showing this is a genuine tradeoff, not a one-sided loss.

Biggest Impacts of a Virtual Workforce on Culture (Top 5)

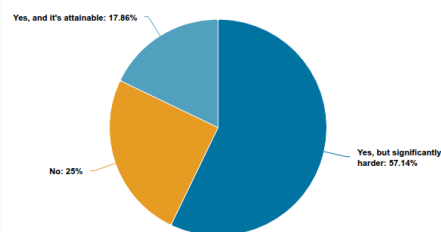


3

Can virtual culture be authentic?

Only 25% said no outright. The dominant view (57%) was that it's possible but significantly harder — requiring deliberate investment most organizations underfund. Just 18% believed it's fully attainable as-is.

Can a Fully Virtual Organization Build an Authentic, Enduring Culture?



4

Hybrid is the perceived sweet spot

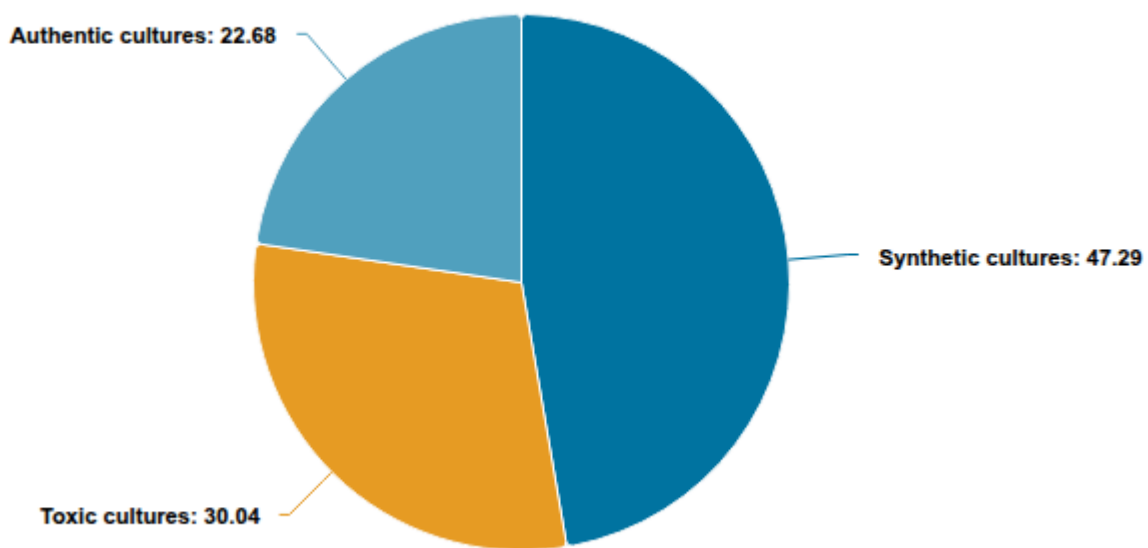
When asked which environment produces the strongest culture, 54% chose hybrid, versus 21% fully in-office and 21% who said work arrangement isn't the real determinant at all — reinforcing that leadership behavior, not location, is the deeper variable.

"I can't really know you and know how we can work effectively together without some personal contact," one participant said — while another countered that virtual work "can support the entire person... it allows people the flexibility to enjoy being human and work hard."

04 Most Organizations Are Perceived as Synthetic, Not Authentic

Asked to allocate 100 points across authentic, synthetic, and toxic culture types based on what they'd expect to find in a typical culture survey today, participants placed less than a quarter of the weight on "authentic" — a striking indictment given how strongly the group values trust and collaboration in principle.

Perceived Culture Mix in Organizations Today (Avg Allocation of 100 Points)



This gap between stated values and perceived reality is the session's central tension: leaders overwhelmingly agree on what culture should deliver, but most doubt their own organizations are actually delivering it.

05 Fixing Culture Starts With Leadership, Not Programs

When imagining themselves as a new CEO inheriting a synthetic or toxic culture, participants' top-voted actions were behavioral and relational, not procedural.

Action	% Selecting (of 5 allowed)
Lead by example and model authentic behavior	67.9%
Listen to and engage with employees	64.3%
Remove toxic leaders and bad apples	50.0%

Foster transparency and open communication	50.0%
Revisit and align core values and vision	46.4%

Notably, "demonstrate visible progress and quick wins" ranked last (14%) — participants see culture repair as a slow, personal, trust-rebuilding process rather than a campaign of announcements. This aligns with the top single barrier to building culture in the first place: weak or uncommitted leadership (73%), well ahead of ego/self-interest (57%) and poor communication (53%).

06 Recommendations

Anchor the culture narrative in trust and collaboration outcomes — the strategic case leaders find most credible — rather than generic values language that scored lower in this group.

Treat hybrid/virtual culture-building as a resourcing decision, not a mindset one: participants believe virtual culture is achievable, but only with deliberate investment in connection (regular in-person touchpoints, structured onboarding, intentional relationship-building), not policy statements alone.

Prioritize leadership behavior audits over new culture programs — remove or retrain leaders who model the wrong behaviors before rolling out values refreshes or training curricula, which participants viewed as comparatively low-impact.

Run a listening tour before making changes — the group repeatedly warned against fast, top-down culture resets ("wait — don't make big changes right away without first listening and learning") in favor of visible, sustained engagement with employees at all levels.

Revisit culture strategy explicitly for the incoming Gen Z workforce; 75% of participants said culture still matters to this cohort, but several noted it will be reframed around meaning, work-life balance, and "how the culture benefits me" rather than traditional belonging.

07 Session Notes

The forum convened 35 active participants spanning Baby Boomer (43%), Millennial (29%), Generation X (26%), and Generation Z (3%) cohorts, split roughly evenly by gender, with representation across all major US regions. Seventy-seven percent were full-time employed and half currently work in a hybrid arrangement. Participants moved through brainstorming, categorization, ranked selection, allocation, and open-ended survey activities across five thematic sections: cultural power, cultural experience, cultural impact, virtual culture, and culture ahead.

Participants rated the session platform highly effective at supporting the discussion (average 9.54 of 10), and two-thirds had participated in a prior Converge session.